

## **Turning Research into Classroom Practice: AKA “So What!?”**

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Turning Research into Classroom Practice: AKA “So What!?” is a bridge to disseminate research into the classroom. A research informed instructor is an up-to-date instructor! In this feature, two “back-to-back” articles on the same timely subject from the Fashion discipline of Family and Consumer Sciences are examined. A quick review of the articles is followed by real and practical applications that can be incorporated into the classroom.

### Article citations:

Cheek, W.K. & Easterling, C.R. (2008). Fashion Counterfeiting: Consumer Behavior Issues. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 100, 40-48.

Kozar, J.M. & Marcketti, S.B. (2008). Counterfeiting: Educational Influences, Ethical Decision Making. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 100, 49-50.

### Quick review of the articles:

The first article presented findings on the growing problem of counterfeit merchandise. This problem is especially critical to the fashion industry due to the nature of the design and property rights issues. Protecting a brand name, label, and design is important in securing a reputation of high quality from consumers.

The article begins by discussing the growing problem of counterfeit items, on a global level. Common “knock-offs” of music CDs, drugs, apparel, sunglasses, purses, jewelry, etc. abound. The article points out that while not usually posing a physical danger (with the exception of counterfeit drugs), the effects on the economy are impactful and difficult to measure. Though recent estimates suggest that counterfeiting results in a loss of over one million dollars in tax revenues each year; American companies lose \$20-250 billion annually (depending on the source of information) (Fishman, 2005, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2008).

The purpose of the article was to educate FCS professionals on the counterfeiting industry and to stimulate responsible consumer behavior. The article reviewed several important definitions, discussed the growth of the counterfeit industry, followed by a review of why consumers purchase counterfeit goods, ending with the impact on the economy.

Why has the counterfeit industry grown? Consumers want name brand products at affordable prices. Consumers also feel that buying counterfeit products is a victimless crime (though ties between terrorism (and/or crime syndicates) and counterfeiting have been alleged. Many consumers feel that prices are too high and have a negative feeling about businesses in general. To exacerbate the problem, some businesses

knowingly purchase counterfeit products to cut costs and increase sales. They know there is little chance of prosecution.

The authors conclude by acknowledging that counterfeit fashion goods are not always easy to spot and consumers are confused. They maintain that FCS professionals must educate students on the issue and attempt to rectify the situation.

The second article briefly reported on a study using data from a survey administered to college students. Undergraduate and graduate students (n=741) at two Midwestern universities were surveyed on their knowledge and concern about counterfeiting. Three-quarters of the respondents were female, and half were between the ages of 18 and 20. Findings suggest that students who were more knowledgeable and concerned about the negative aspects of counterfeiting were more likely to believe that being associated with counterfeiting (producing, selling, buying) was a crime. In addition, students who viewed counterfeiting as a crime were less likely to purchase or associate with purchasers of counterfeit goods. Results are positive and authors suggest that further education on the subject is essential in FCS classrooms.

#### Practice or “So What!?”... how can I apply this in my classroom?:

Incorporating activities aimed at recognizing fakes can help students identify red flags on counterfeit items. This would be especially critical to students going into fashion buying; however, students in all fields may benefit, if not in their professional life, certainly in their personal life. Fakes cost a fraction of the cost of the “real” thing, however, quality suffers in the counterfeit products; thus cheating consumers (students) out of their hard earned money. In addition, the “fake market” may help fund terrorism and organized crime. Understanding this will provide students with full knowledge. Below are some activities in which students can participate and learn about counterfeit products:

- a) Have students review the Consumer Reports counterfeit quiz. Have them review the pictures and descriptions of the items shown. Would they have been able to “spot the fake”?
- b) Direct students to products for sale online. Popular sites like Craig’s List and eBay can be reviewed for products. Have students look at products to determine if they are fake or real, not solely using price as the determining factor (though recent research indicates that sellers of counterfeit items are increasing prices to throw consumers “off the trail”).
- c) Have students go to a local market or swap meet to look at products for sale there. Are there purses, shoes, sunglasses, jewelry that students think might not be authentic? What are some tell-tale signs students identified that might indicate the items are real or fake?
- d) Have students go to a popular department store to look at similar items. How do the items compare to those from a swap meet?
- e) Have students research fakes on the Internet. Why is China mentioned so frequently for a producer of fakes? What are some things to look for from the

Chinese government to prove authenticity? (hint: official seals from China's manufacturing sector).

- f) Have students visit official sites of designers (ex: Coach, Gucci, Oakley, Rolex) to see what things to watch for on authentic merchandise.
- g) Have students research the link between counterfeit products and terrorism and organized crime. See if they can document some proof of this relationship. Have them indicate how, if the link is true, when they purchase a counterfeit item they are fostering negative illicit behaviors.

## REFERENCES

Fishman, T.C. (2005, January 9). Manufacture. *The New York Times Magazine*. 41-44.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce, (2008). Get the facts. [www.thetruecosts.org](http://www.thetruecosts.org)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

International AntiCounterfeiting Coalition (IACC). [www.iacc.org/](http://www.iacc.org/)

[www.stopfakes.gov](http://www.stopfakes.gov)

[www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org) (search for their counterfeit quiz)

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